

(A Paper from Southern NGOs, work in progress still, for sign up both in Bangladesh and in other southern countries, on ground level reaction on WHS and Grand Bargain Outcome, 7th July 2017, please do not quote officially)

WHS and Grand Bargain One Year On: Feedback from Southern Civil Societies

Our Common Space, our Complementary Roles: Partnership for Sovereign and Accountable Civil Society Growth

1. Who we are, why and how it is.

We are Southern civil societies, working within national boundaries with a home grown or indigenous background. We consider ourselves as Local Non-Government Organizations (LNGO) in this whole of statement, we do both humanitarian and development activism, and we also consider ourselves as a part of civil society. We consider non-government organizations (NGO) which work in more than one national boundary, whether they are from global north or south to be International NGOs (INGOs), which are also part of civil society.

We appreciate the WHS (World Humanitarian Summit) outcome. We are also inspired by the Grand Bargain which is a commitment signed up to by 53 of the largest humanitarian donors, UN agencies and INGOs to improve the way aid is delivered to people in need; although unfortunately there is little participation from southern LNGOs.

We are committed to carry forward the WHS and GB outcomes in the ground level, although we have some differences and differences in interpretations level too. But we feel now that far more attention should be made to minimize the gap between policy declarations and policy implementation by different stakeholders.

We know that, we have some committed allies in global north too, we also invite them to sign this feedback petition as a supporter to our appeal that, building a civil society sector is our common space. But we the NGOs from global south and north should have different role, complementary to each other and in respect of national level in global south, we need equality and dignity based partnership for sovereign and accountable civil society growth.

2. Our believe and our premise

We believe that growth of civil society or NGOs, historically due to some limit of our state and markets and complementary thereby. As in some special circumstances state organs (including political parties) and markets agencies face limits to meet some public demands, especially of marginalized and affected population. So to meet the need as on the basis of complementary approach, it is a common and generally acceptable narrative is that, there should be balance existence of state, market and civil societies. It is to promote welfare and redistributive state, and this trinity factors leading to a society which should be based on democratic principles and respecting human rights. We believe that we have a unity among the southern and northern NGOs that we need more or equal status and right full share as civil society for participation from our state and market sectors. It is to play an effective role for our common future and public goods. Especially in global south the need is immediate and imperative.

In fact the debate of equal status to civil society along with state and market sector has over, especially if we look at the discourse of aid effectiveness to development effectiveness, which has evolve from

Paris Declaration to Busan Declaration. State parties in generally have agreed, in most cases UN has created rightful spaces for civil societies in this regard.

There is strong nexus in humanitarianism and development activism, while humanitarians emphasize save life, development lead a society toward not to create such a humanitarian crisis. Nowadays almost all the development NGOs do humanitarian work, but there also a continued need for those that focus solely on humanitarian works, like Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies and MSF. So, we should consider the need of unity in work in both the sectors rather than bringing the discourse of separation in this regard. Our common objectives to build a society where there will be no humanitarian crisis will arise in future, it is actually a long term development goal too.

3. Our urge during WHS : equality and dignity based partnership

Our Bangladeshi friends ie the 28 LNGOs in the banner of Bangladeshi NGOs for WHS were involved in WHS process during May 2015. <http://coastbd.net/national-consultation-process-for-world-humanitarian-summit-2016-with-bangladesh-national-ngos/> . They conducted Focus Group Consultations in different 20 districts of Bangladesh on different issues related to disasters. After the consultation and in the eve of Dushanbe South and Central Asia WHS consultation, they have developed a statement titled **“Equal and Dignified Partnership for Sustainable Capacity in Disaster Risk Reduction and Response”**. <http://coastbd.net/equal-and-dignified-partnership-for-sustainable-capacity-in-disaster-risk-reduction-and-response/>. We endorse those demands, key common issues came from those consultations was;

- a. Institutional and capacity building support to local NGOs.
- b. Priority to work with local government and government agencies.
- c. Need of priority based investment to construct embankment in coastal and flood prone area.
- d. Increasing investment for disaster risk reduction and building resilience community.
- e. INGOs should not compete with LNGOs in respect of fund hunting in national level.
- f. UN should consider new protocol of climate displaced people as we feel that Bangladesh alone hardly be able to meet this displacement situation.

Then before the global consultation in Geneva they have developed another statement through participatory process titled **“Making Humanitarian and Development Activism Localized and Accountable: 7 Initial Actionable Proposals on Reshaping Aid”**. <http://coastbd.net/7-initial-actionable-proposals-on-reshaping-aid/> . These 7 actionable Proposals were elaborated after a series of consultation in different parts of the country with Local NGOs and civil society representatives that ended with a National level consultation with NGOs and Government policy makers. The statement as widely distributed during Geneva consultation as well in WHS Istanbul summit. Key issues of the statement were;

1. Setting Indicators on Principles of Partnership and Periodical Review.
2. Prioritize Accountability in place of ‘Accounts Ability’. Accounts Standard Must be Set Out according to the Local and Situational Context.
3. Complaint Response Mechanism and Protecting Whistle Blower Policies.

4. Minimum 20% overhead Management Cost to the Partner Organization, Not Only for Central Management, for Institutional Development also.
5. INGO and UN Organizations Must Consider Getting Out of Direct Project Operation and Fund Raising in National Level:
6. Stop Brain drain from Local NGOs. Introduce Equal Compensation for Same Level of Competency. Reduce the Gap in Salary and Benefits during Partnership.
7. Partnership Agreement Must Include the Clause for Arbitration and Joint Evaluation:

Apart from above, COAST has organized a National level seminar title as **“Principles of Partnership: Learning and Way Forward”** in cooperation with International Council for Voluntary Agencies (ICVA) in August 2015 in Dhaka. Please see the outcome and report. <http://coastbd.net/principles-of-partnership-learning-and-way-forward/> .

And on 19th August 2016 we observe World Humanitarian Day with a title of **“WHS Outcomes: Experiences of Recent Disaster Response in Bangladesh”**. It was mainly a seminar event with national level stakeholders to popular WHS outcomes, the Grand Bargain and Charter for Change. Please see the outcome and report. <http://coastbd.net/whs-nngos-bangladesh/>

4. INGOs and UN agencies primary role should be to facilitate and promote local civil society in global south

One of the primary outcomes of the WHS were localization and accountability. It means promotion of local level civil society, which demands appropriate partnership. There was global level discourse and of the re-affirmation of the Principles of Partnership (<https://www.icvanetwork.org/principles-partnership-statement-commitment>), agreed by 40 organizations, UN agencies, World Bank, international Red Crescent and Red Cross movement and others during 2007. The principles are Equality, Transparency, Result Oriented Approach, Responsibility and Complementarity. But there was little on the follow up and operationalization of those partnership principles in ground level. In global south, INGOs / UN agencies both have to play facilitating role to promote local civil societies; they must step back from operational role. So, we feel there are needs in this regard (i) need of preparation of partnership policies by INGOs and UN agencies, and its implementation through open, transparent and competitive basis, (ii) there should code of conduct in this regard, (iii) annual open review of implementation of this partnership principles and code of conduct, (iv) device downward management accountability mechanism (e.g., information disclosure policy, complain response mechanism, whistle blowing policies for beneficiary and partners) and (v) investment in creating demand side among the LNGOs, so that they can have dialogue to change the existing narrative of “sub contacting or patron client relationship”. INGOs and UN organizations have to examine why they are working in operational manner in global south, while they cannot be sustainable, their local level advocacy hardly politically acceptable and while their transaction cost is so high.

5. Principled and criteria based partnership with LNGO: create a transparent and healthy competition but in maintaining highest Level of inclusiveness and coordination in sector wide.

WHS and Grand Bargain outcome should not be interpreted only with direct funding and funding to LNGOs. It is also for LNGOs accountability toward community, implanting sustainability of development and humanitarian initiative with the community and mobilization for making the state accountable for public goods too. So, taking this in view INGOs, UN agencies and donors must prepare their partnership policies and set criteria. Following points should be considered in this regards, (i) LNGO should not only

be effective in service delivery but also effective in advocacy towards state, (ii) the LNGO should have a transparent accountability framework which is active and free from conflict of interest, and (iii) proven track record of generating own resources for first response and gaining sustainability. The partner selection process must be in a transparent and competitive process toward a reward for good and committed works.

A recent trend has been observed among some INGOs in countries in the name of facilitating localization, their selection and so called “national network” building approach, become creating division, tensions and hindering sector wise coordination. May be sector wise common unity is hardly possible, but a culture of coordination (e.g., inviting each other, participating in each other meeting, sharing information etc) should be prevailed. Criteria based transparent and open process with inclusiveness might be the best response in this regard.

6. INGOs must concentrate on campaign against “De-globalization of Humanity and Responsibility” in their home of origin.

Most of the northern NGOs have been originated with private individual funding with awareness in global north that, humanity is global and the individual must have to take responsibility as a global citizen. But it is observed that, due to the increase public / government funding in north for overseas development assistance, most of the INGOs has become busy on fulfilling conditions given by northern governments and being playing the role as mere operational or intermediaries. In this present age of growing xenophobia and protectionism, INGOs should re consider their present role in aid architecture. They should conduct development education and advocacy in their northern countries against such “de-globalization of humanity and responsibility”, should uphold the spirit of “global citizenry” that we are living in one planet, we have to save it and we have to share responsibility and resources.

7. Last but not least : We / LNGOs need stand on our own feet with an accountable, inclusive and knowledge based approach.

LNGO has to understand the changing paradigms and has to remold their role, in following line of actions, (i) it is not mere service delivery, it is also an advocacy as we have to integrate our work in a rights based approach, i.e., making our state and political forces accountable for public goods, (ii) it is not the era of nationalism, we have to be internationalist but with patriotism, taking the voice from local to national and to international, as all policies and practices integrated in those levels, so that we have to be knowledge and technology based, (iii) we have to be accountable simultaneously to peer and as well to down ward, toward community, we must have accountability frame work which is active, regular and free from conflict of interest, (iv) in national level it is might be difficult to have a common platform, but we can keep each other coordination (e.g., in providing information on what we are doing, inviting each other’s in events, not attacking each other in creating face loss situation) , (v) critical but constructive advocacy and positive engagement with government and political leaders for policy and practice changes and making our state accountable and responsive, (vi) maintaining a cost culture which reflect our commitment to poor or downtrodden people, value to the money and simplicity so that as much as money and resources will go to the community, (vii) implanting sustainability index / indicators in our effort so that we will have own resources to respond fast and long term capacity to stand without dependency and (ix) advocacy to our government so that government will come forward to provide public resources to our initiatives in long run.

The End